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ABSTRACT

This presentation is a review of the literature on the assessment of standardized test scores in black colleges. Divergent points of view exist relative to the misuse and use of standardized test scores for the sole purpose of admission of black students. Some misuses of the American College Test (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) are noted, and an assessment report on the use of standardized tests by the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) is reviewed. The UNCF study revealed that 80% of the responding black colleges require standardized test scores for entering freshmen, but 92% of these used the scores for placement purposes only (i.e., largely to keep students after admission) rather than for admissions purposes. The UNCF report made several recommendations with regard to standardized tests and black students: (1) black colleges should systematically collect and examine information on how test scores function for their particular student population; (2) black colleges should institute new programs and reorganize existing resources to improve test scores and instill confidence in its students about test taking; and (3) each black college must make a serious commitment to remedying at least one aspect of the testing problem and make that commitment clear to all in the institution. One historically black college experienced a change in its students' high failure rate on standardized tests when it instituted the following changes with regard to testing and test preparation: (1) it developed a faculty support system; (2) it evaluated the correlation of content, item type and format, and cognitive level on the ACT, SAT, and National Teacher Examinations (NTE); (3) it developed an advanced testing seminar; (4) it administered NTE-like pre- and post-tests to sophomores and juniors; and (5) it scheduled tutoring sessions. Though this review cites divergent points of view with regard to the use and misuse of standardized test scores of black students, it is emphasized that the black colleges must provide the necessary supportive leadership and innovative programs to insure that their students are exposed to the characteristics of standardized tests, for they are a reality of life. (TJH)

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Assessment Of Standardized Tests Scores And The Black College Environment

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Assessment Of Standardized Tests Scores

And The Black College Environment

This presentation is a review of the literature on the Assessment of Standardized Tests Scores and the Black College Environment and will focus on a widely held idea that when assessing standardized tests scores (ACT and SAT) in a Black college environment, the results do not accurately reflect achievement potential among Black students. The paper is divided into three areas (a) an overview of assessment and testing, (b) assessing the inadequacies of standardized tests and (c) an assessment report of the United Negro College Fund and standardized tests scores. Further findings and recommendations are also included in this area.

An Overview Of Assessment And Testing

Salvia (1985) wrote that "assessment" is a multifaceted process that involves far more than the administration of a test. Therefore, assessment is the way one performs on a variety of task in a variety of settings. Good assessment procedures take in consideration the fact that anyone's performance on a task is influenced by the demands of the task itself, by the history and the characteristic the individual brings to the task, and by the factors inherent in the setting in which the assessment is carried out. He further stated that a test may be thought of as a set of tasks or questions intended to elicit particular types of behaviors when presented under standardized conditions and yield scores that have psychometric properties. Testing, then means exposing a person to a particular set of questions in order to obtain a score. Testing may also be part of a larger process known as assessment.

Assessing The Inadequacies Of Standardized Tests

This section will examine a few of the misconceptions and conceptions in using standardized test scores as a sole criteria for admission of Black students to college. More importantly, the ACT (American College Test) and the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) will be a point of focus.

Misuse Of The ACT

Testimony given by Hilliard (1981) Educational Psychologist at the Georgia State University in the *Ayers vs. Winters* higher education law suit clearly pointed out at least two (2) inadequacies of the ACT as it is presently used by Mississippi universities for admission purposes.

1. He found that virtually no empirical data was in the IHL (Institutions of Higher Learnings) records to show that the ACT is a valid measure of school experiences which were actually offered to Black children in Mississippi. Therefore, Hilliard stated that the plaintiffs would be unable to regard it as an appropriate measure of high school achievement.

2. Hilliard (1981) further stated: "there are no empirical data among anything that I've examined to show that the ACT is a valid measure of the content which students will be offered in Mississippi colleges and universities. Therefore the ACT cannot be regarded . . . as a valid achievement test for content." Those findings are consistent with ACT's own technical literature.

Substantial Evidence Exists From Various Sources To Support The Above Statements

According to Hills (1975) the ACT tests are clearly neither measures of aptitudes nor of achievement. The tests seem not to respond rapidly to school instruction. In their

own technical report, (1973) ACT found that the tests are not composed of simple "rote" items but are deliberate conglomerate items requiring verbal and mathematical reasoning as well as other forms of complex problem solving skills. These findings are made clear when one considers how unprepared most students leave elementary and secondary schools, where rote memory and drilling of factual information is the general emphasis of teaching. Foster (1984) pointed out that much of the unprepardness of Black Mississippi college students arises from the poor quality of instruction received at the pre-college level.

Misuse Of The SAT

James Crouse, Education Professor at the University of Delaware, stated in Mitgang Lee's article "Testing Experts" (1986) that: "the time has come to replace the SAT." He argued that the SAT added little to the prediction of college success based solely on high school records. In this same article University of Maryland Education Professor William E. Sedlacek raised the possibility that the SAT is inherently biased against minority students. Since the exam is designed to predict freshmen-year college success, Sedlacek suggests it is unfair to minorities, many of whom do not hit their academic stride until later in their college careers, he said.

According to Owen (1985) the credibility of the testing movement in the name of educational accountability was criticized by Journalist David Owen in his book, *None of the above: Behind the myth of scholastic aptitude*. He wrote that Carl Campbell Brigham, the creator of the SAT, was known for his studies on the so-called inferiority of Blacks. Owen charged that the SAT is based on a White , upper middle class, suburban point of view, thus penalizing Blacks and urban minorities. He further stated that despite the shortcomings in tests, the testing movement will likely continue unchanged for quite sometime.

An Assessment Report Of The United Negro College Fund

And The Use Of Standardized Tests Scores

In a recent study undertaken by the UNCF (February 1986) to determine how member colleges view and use test scores, with 35 of the 43 member colleges responding to the survey, the results indicated that Black colleges pay little attention to test scores as admission tools but do use them for placement purposes.

The vast majority 80 percent of the schools survey do require test scores for entering freshmen. However, these scores are rarely used to reject students. Only 11 percent of the colleges rejected prospective students because their test scores were too low.

Most of the colleges did feel that test scores were criterion in selecting students. Only 26 percent felt that test scores were important in this respect, while 66 percent felt that the high school average was the most important criterion.

Regardless of the assessment of the usefulness of test scores in admissions, most, or 92 percent, use SAT and ACT test scores for placement purposes along with other placement tests. Thus, scores are use largely to keep students after admission. This study also suggested that UNCF institutions pay little attention to the testing issue. Only three (3) of the 35 colleges had conducted studies of test scores in their college environments. Virtually none had conducted systematic studies of what contributed to good performance on graduate admission test. It may be that Black colleges share a general feeling that test scores are unimportant for Black students. This feeling might lead them to value tests less than other colleges do.

The report further stated that Black colleges should assume the role they would like to take in relation to the problem of standardized tests and Black students. This report listed four recommendations pertinent to this important issue:

1. Black colleges should systematically collect and examine more concrete informa-

tion on how test scores function for their particular student population. It is the lack of data that has led to invalid assumptions about Blacks and standardized tests.

2. Black colleges should consider several ways in which they would like to approach the problems, such as instituting new programs, reorganizing existing resources, improving test scores, and instilling confidence students will need in test taking situations later in life. The possible approaches are virtually endless, limited only by the individual school, its unique student body, and its students' needs. Many remedies are possible without large amounts of new money.

3. The colleges should make a serious commitment to remedying some aspect of the testing problem by choosing one approach and making the commitment clear to all in the institution.

4. The school should evaluate its efforts in concrete terms such as the improvement on graduate tests versus ACTs and SATs, increasing the number of students who pass competency tests, the number who take tests at the graduate level, and lifting student confidence in testing abilities, or in other ways important to the college and its students.

One HBC (Historically Black College) suggested similar recommendations. Spencer (1986) wrote that the HBC must understand the value of teaching test taking, not as a brief one-time activity, but as a life-surivival skill for Black youth, since taking tests is a reality of life with which they will be confronted from elementary to graduate school, when they seek employment, or possibly even gain advancement in the work place. That same college has experienced a change in its students high failure rate on standardized tests scores by developing a five-phase approach to testing and test preparation:

1. Development of needed support among faculty for a viable testing program.

2. Evaluation of the correlation of content, item type and format, and cognitive level on the ACT, SAT and NTE.

3. Development and implementation of an advanced testing seminar.

4. Administration of NTE-like pre and post tests to its sophomores and juniors.

5. Scheduling of tutoring sessions by content—area faculty based on student's need for information and/or help in math, science, and the arts.

Other HBCs have developed similar programs, but too many HBCs are still treating test taking as the bandaid method to clear up an infection.

It is also clear that HBCs should avail themselves of publications and services offered by the test publishers. For example, Educational Testing Service, since 1983, has been actively involved in a cooperative effort with HBC known as the HBC-ETS Collaboration. Through this joint venture, HBCs have been provided information and the opportunity to develop expertise on their campuess through training in such areas as:

1. Financial aid activities.
2. Use of computers for academic and administrative purposes.
3. Program and project evaluation.
4. Enhancing graduate and professional school opportunities for HBC graduates.
5. Improving teacher preparation and test performance.
6. Conducting research on HBCs.

Participation in these activities for HBCs includes receiving a wealth of materials, information, and training. The report further stated that to date, over 89 percent of the 88 HBCs have participated in some of these activities.

Summary

In summary, this review of assessment of standardized tests as it relates to the Black college environments clearly cites divergent points of view relative to the misuse and use of standardized tests scores for the sole purpose of admission of Black students in often unwarranted. However, Black colleges must understand that standardized tests remain to be one

of the most useful tools of an assessment process when making decisions about students. Therefore, the Black college environment should and must continue to provide the necessary supportive leadership and innovative programs in order to insure that their students are exposed to the characteristics of standardized tests, which include specific scoring techniques and the content covered on the test they are required to take.

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